

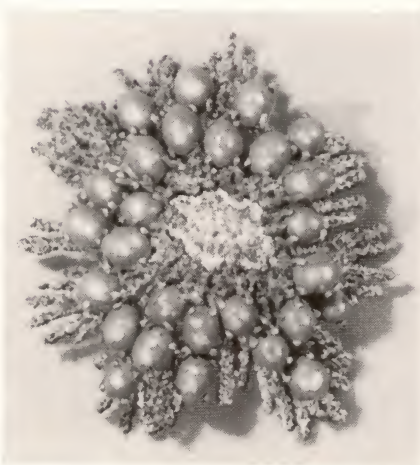
responsible critics do a disservice to the country when they fail to point out that Vietnam suffers not from a failure to come up to a moral or strategic imperative but that it takes place at a time when America is in a period of self-appraisal absent in 1950.

It is often said that the prevalence of television has done much to change us, particularly in our ways of responding to such phenomena as war, racial injustice, and violence, and to the personalities of public men. It would be surprising if this were not to some extent so. The war in Vietnam is close to the center of the national consciousness because of the ease with which we can "follow" it—"live," or almost. Because of television, it is impossible to be unaware of, and hence indifferent to, the war, as the people of the European colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely unaware of the prolonged and costly campaigns—many of them much like the war in Vietnam—being carried on by their armies and navies in distant parts of the world. I also think it likely that, as some people believe, the daily cocktail-time spectacle of death and atrocity (I sat down to dinner a few evenings ago just as C.B.S. was showing some American troops cutting the ears off Vietcong corpses as souvenirs of the combat) has contributed to the spreading revulsion and to anti-war sentiment. To argue this case, however, it would seem necessary to explain how it happens that a people with an enormous appetite for violence on television, in movies, and in highbrow as much as in low- and middlebrow literature may be repelled by a few minutes a day of the real thing, which is very often less sickening than the simulated variety. This would be no problem for Norman Mailer or H. Rap Brown, each of whom tells us that we are and always have been a violent people and that the televised war in Vietnam satisfies our lust for violence and serves as a graduate school in murder for our young men. I reject this view. Despite our lynchings, gang wars, race riots, and casual military undertakings, I do not think our people are particularly given to violence. They are human beings and have their share of human weaknesses, of which a lust for violence has always been one. If violence is as American as apple pie, it is also as French as *quiche Lorraine*. There have been as many attempts on the life of Charles de Gaulle as on the lives of all the American Presidents put together. It may be that our assassins are better shots or that the French *Sûreté* is smarter than our Secret Service. In any case, I have



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been in many parts of the world where violence, organized and unorganized, is far more easily provoked than as a rule it is here, and far more a part of everyday existence.

I do not know why our popular culture is so hung up on violence and sadism. I think it may have less to do with the need for violence than with the third-rateness of the culture and with the kind of talent that turns out all this awful stuff. That is to say, a partial explanation may be that violence, like sentimentality, lends itself to easy exploitation. A stupid or lazy dramatist can save himself a lot of hard work by writing scenes in which the action consists of people maiming one another. An exchange of gunfire can be more easily and convincingly dramatized than a clash of human wills. And, of course, people go for it—but not just Americans. Ours is a culture largely manufactured for export, and the very worst of it is a smash hit all over the world. But just as the carnality of our popular culture does not prove that we are more libidinous than others, its emphasis on violence does not prove that we are more brutish than others. Furthermore, there is to be observed an almost complete disjuncture between the violence of Vietnam and the violence of our cinematic and electronic fantasies. Although war movies like "The Dirty Dozen" are big at the box office, the most topical of wars, Vietnam, has yet to be the subject of a motion picture. This, we are told, on excellent authority, is not because the producers are reluctant to exploit it. The subject has been deliberately avoided, it seems, for reasons rather like those behind the avoidance—at least, until recently—of the subjects of sodomy and miscegenation. It would offend the audience, or a good part of it, and in acknowledgment of this fact—presumably established by the usual surveys of the market—the major producers have agreed among themselves to lay off. Even as heady a matching of star and subject as John Wayne and the Army Special Forces has had difficulty attracting the capital needed for a picture to be called "The Green Berets." If, à la Norman Mailer, President Johnson is only John Wayne in the White House, he may be more vulnerable than we know.

As a nation among nations, as a force in the world, we may be behaving more chauvinistically today than we have ever behaved in the past. This almost has to be true, because our power is so immense that any ugly display of it makes an impression commensurate with its magnitude. But among us, as a

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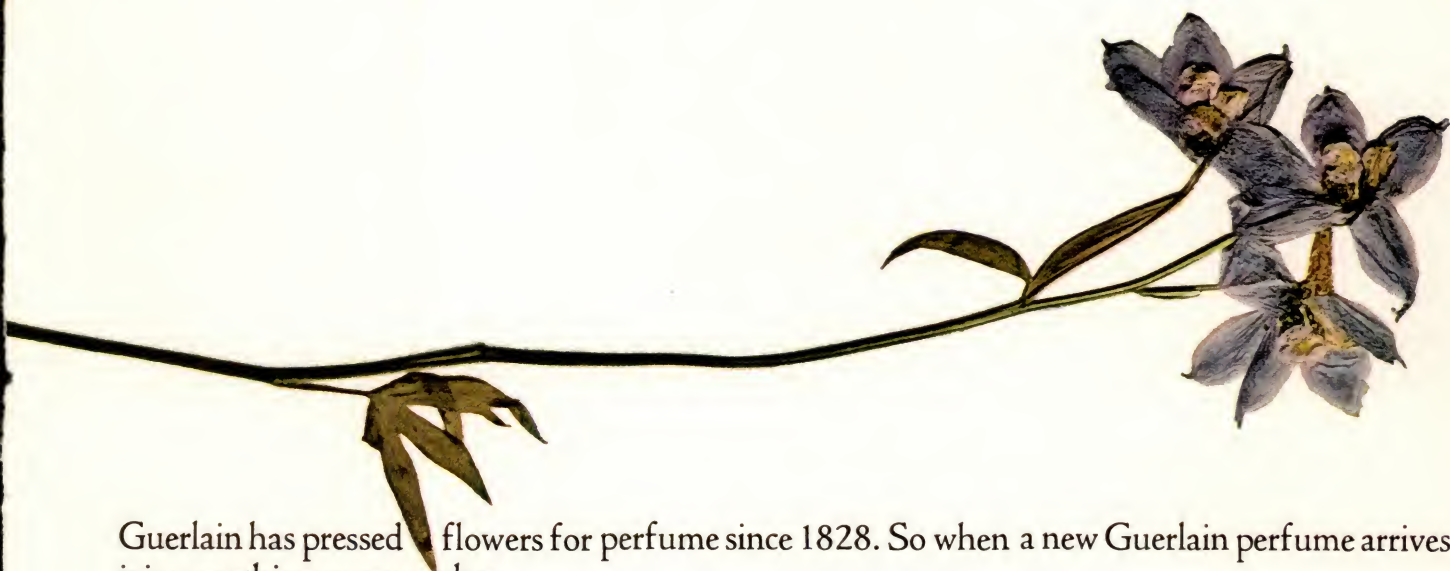


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people, chauvinism and jingoism have been declining steadily since the First World War. Although Hitler's Germany was more detestable than Kaiser Wilhelm's, there was less Hun-hating in the Second World War than in the First. What was "liberty cabbage" in 1918 was sauerkraut in 1945. There was not much flag-waving in the Second World War, and still less in the Korean war. But now we seem to have made a really radical break with the past. This is the first war of the century of which it is true that opposition to it is not only widespread but fashionable. It is the first in connection with which it seems in downright bad taste to invoke patriotism; while the Korean war was still in progress, theatres were showing such movies about it as "A Yank in Korea," "Korea Patrol," "Glory Brigade," "Battle Circus," and "Mission Over Korea." In the two wars before this one, there was a conspicuous shortage of martial airs; and now, for the first time, popular songs of bitter protest, such as Joan Baez's "Saigon Bride" and Pete Seeger's "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," are part of the popular culture.

If we could gauge a nation's penchant for violence by its official rhetoric and its popular culture, China would stand first in both categories. In the rhetoric department, we would rank far down the list and in popular culture perhaps second or third, though it is not to be forgotten that many others consume our product exactly as we do. Some Chinese are behaving very strangely these days, but I do not for a moment believe they are an abnormally violent people, and I am not so sure their leaders are more violent than ours. They just talk rougher and beat more people up. The medium is not the message. The message I get from my eyes and ears is that, because of this war and certain attendant miseries, kookiness of every sort is alarmingly on the rise. At the same time, if it's a sign of one's sanity to be against the war, and a sign of relative sanity to prefer a limited war to the world's last great shoot-out, we are in better shape than many of us know. Consider the extraordinary extent of the opposition to this war—over forty per cent of the American people now, with the number increasing each month—and, perhaps equally notable, the distaste for it among those who do not oppose it. Nothing like this has been known in this century. Ordinarily, in this and most other modern states, opposition to war evaporates once the decision to wage it has been taken, once the killing





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has begun. When the bugles sound and the colors are unfurled, almost everyone becomes a patriot of the Stephen Decatur, or my-country-right-or-wrong, persuasion. Such patriots seem very scarce today, and they speak softly, if at all. In the Senate there are a handful of screaming eagles, but mostly there are old-school politicians—like Senator Russell, of Georgia—who explain in patient, weary voices that we have to get on with the war because, regardless of the merits of the enterprise, we are in it and have committed our troops and our honor to it. Here is a terse description of the extraordinary state of affairs in the United States Senate today—a summary, by C.B.S., of a mid-October survey it conducted:

On Vietnam, the U.S. Senate is advising more and consenting less. In the C.B.S. News survey, nearly half the senators responding said they disapproved the conduct of the war. Open support for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution dropped dramatically. Eighteen senators wanted the bombing of North Vietnam completely stopped.

We talked with 95 senators. Eight of them refused to participate, 87 responding to the questions on the conduct of the war. Three years ago, President Johnson took a survey of his own. It was called the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, supporting his authority to do anything necessary in Southeast Asia. Eighty-eight approved then, two did not. Today, only 34 are prepared to publicly support a Tonkin Resolution without reservation or change. Fifteen refused to comment, and where two voted against it in 1964, 20 would now vote no.

On Vietnam today, 42 senators disapprove the Administration's conduct of the war. Thirty-two approve. Eleven would not commit themselves, including the Senate's Minority Leader, Everett Dirksen. His "no comment" follows strong defense of the President on the floor. Disapproval takes two directions. Fifteen are dissatisfied because they want more military action to end the war. Twenty-seven want less, in the form of bombing pauses or de-escalations.

Most senators feel their constituents think as they do, 46 reporting the folks at home disapprove the handling of the war, 22 reporting constituent approval. They notice a recent change in their public's opinion, too. Thirty-three of the senators say their people have shifted, and 28 of them say it is in the direction of wanting less military action.

On bombing policy, the Senate goes in all directions. Eighteen want bombing of the North completely stopped. Twenty-one say it should be increased, to include more lucrative targets. Twenty-four go along with whatever the President or the military want to do, and 12 suggest less bombing or a pause.

The sleeper question of the survey turned out to be the last one, asking if the senators favored direct negotiations with the Vietcong. There was more agreement on this than anything else. Forty-

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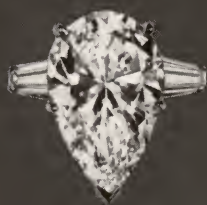
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six senators said yes. Sixteen said no to direct talks with the guerrilla front. One of them wanted a military victory so complete as to have no Vietcong left to negotiate with.

Many answers to the C.B.S. News survey were qualified, justifying the opinion of several senators that polls never really satisfy with a full measurement of attitudes, but three things do emerge: a crumbling of the solid front support given three years ago with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, an infectious restlessness in the Senate and among its constituents with the progress of the war, and a growing impatience with a long twilight struggle where victories do not decide, and the end cannot be seen.

Whether or not they mean it, the leaders of the Administration miss no opportunity to wring their hands and insist that it is peace, and not victory, they seek, and that they are ready at any time to sit down with anyone anywhere, and so on. ("I would depart today for any mutually convenient spot," Rusk said, "if I could meet a representative of North Vietnam with whom I could discuss peace in Southeast Asia.") Do they mean it? Who knows? If they don't mean it, why are they saying it? If they didn't talk so much, the credibility gap might narrow. But they go on. Week after week, the Secretary of Defense, the master of the greatest war machine in history, seems to be trying to signal to us, his countrymen, that the damned thing isn't working, that the bombing is pointless, that it should be stopped. Does he speak for the President? Evidently not, but he still has the job. As for the President, speaking of mankind's behavior in this century, he said earlier this month, in Williamsburg, Virginia, "We can take no pride in the fact that we have fought each other like animals." He added that it "is really an insult to the animals, who live together in more harmony than human beings seem to be able to do." After some generalizations on other failures of statesmanship, he said, "Shame on the world and shame on its leaders." Those who support the war, like those who oppose it, appeal not to the patriotic heart but to the bleeding one. This is without precedent.

Consider, also, the attitudes toward civilian deaths, and casualties, and the general human suffering brought by the war to the Vietnamese, North and South. These, too, are without known precedent. Whether this war is like or unlike any earlier one, it resembles all modern wars in that non-combatants are killed, the innocent suffer greatly, and there is much cruel and needless destruction. In Korea, we bombed and shelled villages, killed countless women and chil-



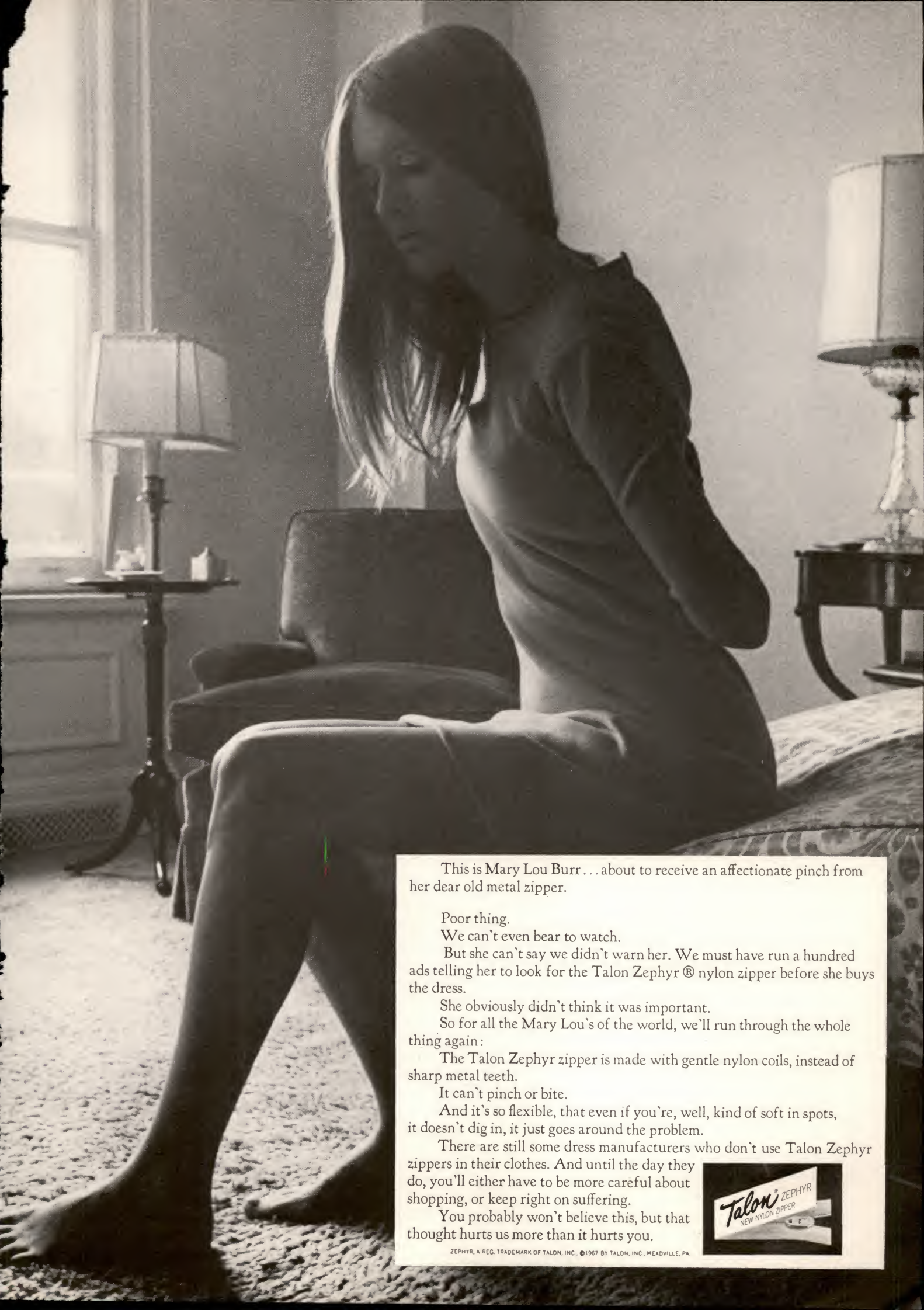
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dren. No Senate committees pestered the generals to learn how many civilians had been killed or what steps were being taken to avoid the slaughter of the innocents. *C'est la guerre*. We killed a great many civilians in the Second World War. If they were Germans or Japanese, it served them right. (Hiroshima produced some immediate revulsion, but it was the newness and hideousness of the weapon employed that affected us, who had been little moved by wider killing with mere TNT.) If they were Italians or Frenchmen, we thought of their deaths as gallant sacrifices they made happily for the liberation of their soil. To be sure, civilized people have always felt that noncombatants should be spared to the greatest extent consistent with military needs, but until now there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the military needs—provided, of course, they were our own—should be the first consideration. Any sense of outrage over atrocities and dead civilians was directed at the enemy. Now, for the first time, the conscience of a large part of the nation has been aroused by agonies for which our own forces are responsible.

All wars are brutalizing, and perhaps in the random violence of the past few years (not merely the riots—not even so much the riots as the murders and assassinations) we are paying part of the price for sanctioned murder in the name of anti-Communism, self-determination, and democracy. But what seems already clear—from the size of the anti-war movements, from the muting of the eagles, from the outrage over atrocities and civilian losses—is that there is building up in this country a powerful sentiment not simply against the war in Vietnam but against war itself, not simply against bombing in Vietnam but against bombing anywhere at any time for any reason, not simply against the slaughter of innocents in an unjust conflict but also against the slaughter of those who may be far from innocent in a just conflict. The youthful protesters would probably acknowledge this without hesitation, only asking themselves why anyone should labor the point so heavily. (Some would no doubt go further, and say that they oppose not only the wars this government runs but everything else it does.) Their elders, thinking of a past they find it necessary to be true to, cannot turn pacifist overnight. They must distinguish between this war and the wars they have supported in the past—up to and including the war in the Middle East a few months ago. But in



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fact our present war is different mainly in that it seems endless and hopeless.

IS it possible for us to come through this experience, if we come through at all, as a pacifist nation? I suppose not. "Pacifist nation" seems a contradiction in terms. If all of us, or most of us, were pacifists, we would have little reason to be a nation. Defense is the fundamental *raison d'être* for the modern state. And if a pacifist nation didn't come apart at the seams, some non-pacifist nation would tear it apart. It seems to me, though, that if the war goes on and if opposition to it continues to increase at the present rate, there will in time be a testing of this whole proposition. No government that is not totalitarian can go on indefinitely fighting a hard war that its people hate. Something has to give. Either the government yields to the popular will or it becomes oppressive and stifles the protest by terror. Thus far, there is no sign that our government has faced the question. With very few exceptions, as far as the anti-war movement is concerned, police power has been used sparingly and in the interests of domestic tranquillity. Few other governments, even when they were not at war, would be as restrained as this one has been in dealing with protest movements, including violent ones. It seems to me that this is in part because we are waging the Vietnam war with an essentially professional military force. Its morale is said to be high and not to be much affected by what is going on here. This state of affairs cannot last indefinitely. Morale will be affected, and then the test will be made. I cannot figure the odds on the outcome. On the one hand, repression is the safest, surest, cheapest course for any government to take. I can imagine the coming to power of an American de Gaulle, or even of someone a lot more authoritarian than de Gaulle. Much of the troublemaking in the months and years ahead will be the work of Negroes, and I can even imagine the imposition of a kind of American apartheid—at least in the North, where Negroes live in ghettos that are easily sealed off. If there should be the will to do it, it could be done quite "legally" and "Constitutionally." There are enough smart lawyers around to figure out how. On the other hand, there is unprecedented opposition to the war inside the odious "power structure" itself. There is much opposition in Congress and in every department of the federal government. The governors of large states and the mayors of great cities—among them





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the Mayor of New York—are opposed to the war. The Supreme Court, which was such a bastion of liberty in the McCarthy years, would make things as hard as possible for all the smart lawyers. The government could, of course, ignore, or even abolish, the Supreme Court. But the Court is not the only American institution that has proved quite resilient in periods of stress. The churches, the press, the universities—all are centers of dissent. It could prove to be crucial that the American middle class—as despicable as the Establishment in the minds of the young and alienated—is also a center of dissent. The proletariat may not be willing to call off strikes or accept pay cuts because of the war, but it offers little support to the protest movements. If we are now undertaking, or are about to undertake, a radical alteration in values, support for it will come not from the workers but from an unproclaimed, and even unwanted, alliance between relatively affluent whites, of whom I happen to be one, and what Daniel P. Moynihan calls the “underclass,” consisting mainly of unemployed Negroes, many of whom want to kill me.

I want American democracy to survive. It is in many ways a fraud. It is not keeping its promises to the American Negroes. It has abused them and many other people. It has very little aesthetic or intellectual appeal. But under it there is at least a hope of redemption. Things do get done here that don't get done under other systems. But it now seems clear to me that if American democracy does survive it will be something quite different from what we have known. I find it hard at this stage to see how a victory for democracy will not also be a victory for pacifism. Those who will lead the struggle are, whether they acknowledge it or not, renouncing war as an instrument of policy. They may insist that of course they would fight the enemy at the gates, or perhaps take arms against a new Hitler if one should arise. But the wars of the future—at least, those that would have any ideological content—are not going to be like the wars of the past. India and Pakistan or India and China may fight over bits and pieces of territory, but the Soviet Union and the United States are agreed on the need for common efforts to cool it when such disputes get hot. Most future wars are apt to be like the war in Vietnam—wars that will be called by their instigators “wars of national liberation.” The Soviet Union, as Nikita Khrushchev long ago





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informed us, will support them. From its point of view, they are irresistible. They cost next to nothing and drive us Americans out of our minds. But if we survive as anything like a free society, we will not be entering them. I simply cannot imagine this country, under any President chosen in a free election, taking on another Vietnam. If this is so, it may be good news. But it means that we won't have much in the way of a foreign policy. We will draw back from all difficult situations. We will leave the field to those who have not renounced war.

**I** HOLD a kind of Tolstoyan view of history, and believe that it is hardly ever possible to determine the real truth about how and why we got from here to there. Since I find it extremely difficult to uncover my own motives, I hesitate to deal with those of other people, and I positively despair at the thought of ever being really sure about what has moved whole nations and whole generations of mankind. No explanation of the causes and origins of any war—of any large happening in history—can ever be for me much more than a plausible one, a reasonable hypothesis. But if we cannot answer the “how” and “why” questions with anything like certitude, we can answer a good many of the “what” ones, and this sometimes enables us to eliminate at least some of the suggested “how”s and “why”s. In regard to Vietnam, I feel confident in isolating certain non-causes and non-origins. We did not go into Vietnam spoiling for a war. It was not the American attitude at the Geneva Conference in 1954 that made what everyone now speaks of as the “Geneva agreements” unworkable. A far more likely thesis is that they proved unworkable because the Russians gave the French (and the South Vietnamese) better terms than they needed to, in the expectation that the French would on this account decide not to enter the proposed European Defense Community. However that may be, those so-called agreements were not a diplomatic settlement of any kind but simply a document setting forth the terms of a cease-fire. To quote John McAlister again:

There were only three documents signed at Geneva, and only four signatories were involved: France, the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia, and the Vietminh. [The Vietminh was an army, not a government. What we think of as the South Vietnamese, or anti-Communist Vietnamese, were never consulted.] These agreements were not treaties and they were not formally rati-

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fied by any government by any process. They were simply agreements between the opposing military commands to stop the fighting in Indo-China and to take measures to prevent the fighting from being resumed. Some confusion has resulted because the "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference," which "noted" the key provisions of the various cease-fire agreements, seemed to emanate from all nine conference participants. However, this "Final Declaration" was not signed by *any* of the participants. It was yet another cold-war device to mask the lack of consensus among the major powers—an "unsigned treaty."

We have sinned greatly and frequently since 1954, but not always in the ways that we think we have. We did not go into Vietnam hoping for a war; after all, we had just passed up a splendid opportunity to join the fighting with our then friends the French at our side. But we were not taken altogether by surprise at discovering that nothing really had been settled by Geneva. Two-fifths of our aid in the early days was military, but something beyond this figure persuades me that we were after something a bit more decent than the opening of a new firing range. The non-Communist state that came into being as a consequence of the Geneva Conference looked to our foreign-aid people as if it might actually work, as if it might turn out to be a nice, prosperous, well-behaved little democracy. In the bright light of hindsight, this seems a ridiculous dream. And what may have been ridiculous about it was not that people like the Emperor Bao Dai and Ngo Dinh Diem would never let it happen but, rather, that Ho Chi Minh would never let it happen. We are always being told what awful people we have supported in Saigon while all along there has existed the alternative of supporting the Vietnamese Thomas Jefferson, Ho Chi Minh, and having him on our side. Ho sounds a lot more attractive than most of the types we have lately been dealing with, and it might have been very smart of us back before 1950, say, to try to strike up some sort of deal with him. And Ho could not have been much interested in us in the early fifties (and anyway think of what McCarthy would have said), and Diem then did not have, or was concealing, his cloven hoof. Diem never seemed a Thomas Jefferson, or even a Lyndon Johnson, but he looked no worse than our man in Korea, Syngman Rhee. And one can at least advance the hypothesis that our troubles have grown not out of Diem's "failure" and ours to create a good society in South Vietnam but out of a certain amount of early success, or, if not that, out of Ho's fear that we





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might somehow succeed someday. It could also be that he was not unmindful of the possibilities for looting. The Americans had put a good many desirable things—including a lot of expensive and well-made weaponry—in South Vietnam, and if he could knock over the government without too much difficulty they would all be his.

Senator Fulbright has been saying for years that foreign aid is dangerous, because it can lead to war. I think he is right. We invest money and, more important, hope in a country, and when some thugs threaten to wreck the country and dash its hopes and ours we are tempted to police the place. Some of the most promising governments in Africa are likely to go to pieces because the leaders of less hopeful neighboring states either can't stand the thought that the people across the way are going to make it or feel that neighbors ought to share and share alike. In the late fifties and early sixties, many Americans who had no appetite for war and no thought that there would be one urged that we give Saigon enough military assistance to put down the Vietcong and enable the government at least to stand on its feet and have enough time and energy to make something of itself. They should have known better. But there was no reason then to think of the difficulties with the Vietcong as having much to do with the balance of power in Asia. Indeed—and here, perhaps, is another important difference between this war and Korea—it seems to have been *our* intervention on a large scale that gave the war a real balance-of-power meaning. In the early sixties, when Laos was a more troublesome place than Vietnam, the Russians were looking the other way. In that period, too, the "domino theory" was generally discredited. There may then have been a chance for a President to reappraise—agonizingly, of course—the whole affair and order a phase-out. Vietnam was still an obscure place, and with us no longer involved it would have been still more obscure. I speak of a time when Kennedy was alive. He could probably have de-escalated, but instead he escalated. If he had lived, and if he had beaten Goldwater or some other Republican in 1964, he might have altered his strategy at some later point. But he died, and Johnson pursued his policy with a vengeance, thereby, in my view, giving the domino theory a strange validity it had earlier lacked: *The dominoes might fall in a certain way because we set them up that way.* If we had got out of Vietnam



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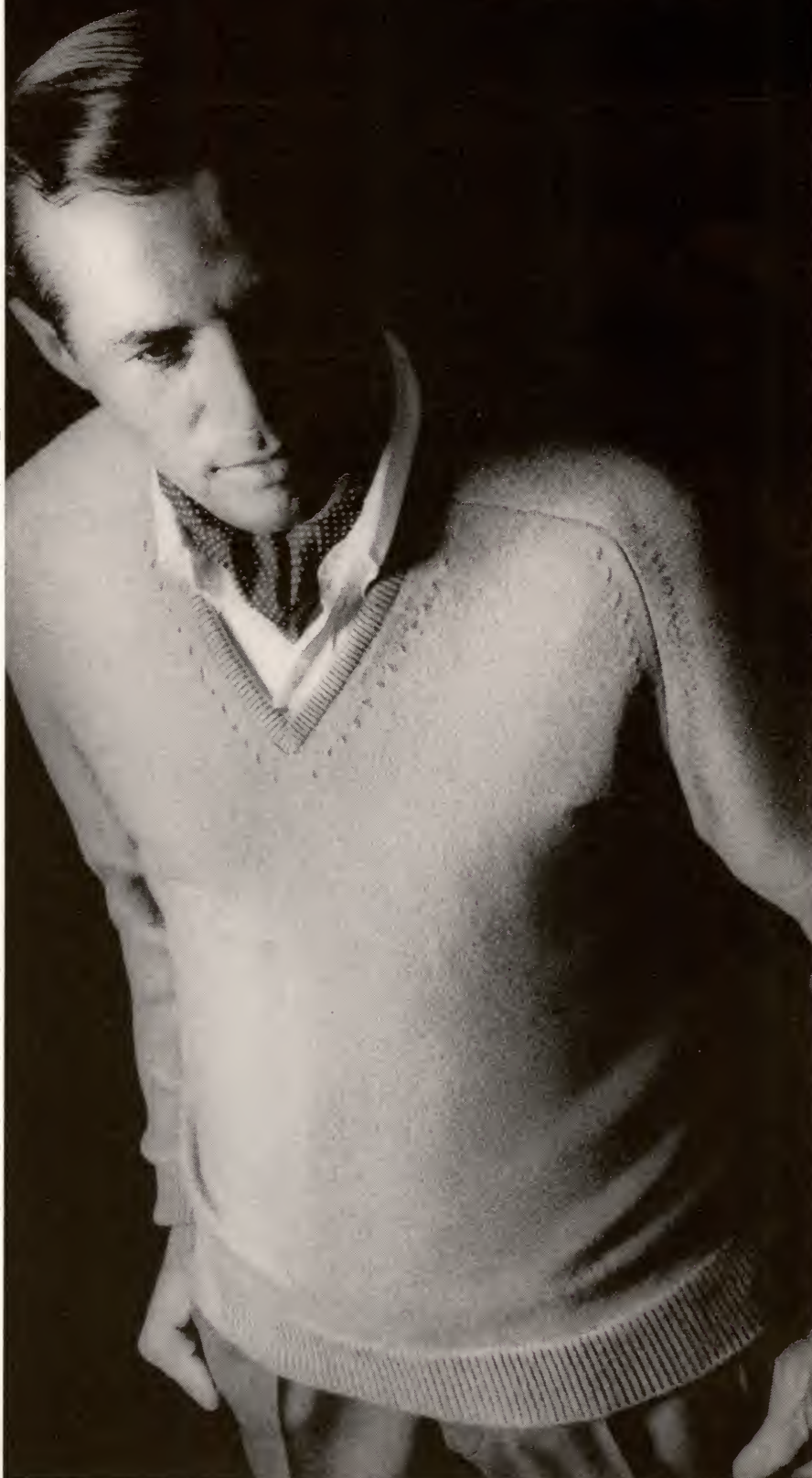


five years ago, the balance of power in Asia might have been affected only insignificantly and imperceptibly. If we got out tomorrow, the consequences might be very serious indeed. We have painted ourselves in.

Until early in 1965, I felt that our role in Vietnam was defensible. The rulers of the country seemed an untrustworthy lot, but that did not appear a good reason for turning the place over to the Vietcong. Knowing that a developing nation cannot possibly manage war and reform at the same time without assistance, I felt that our assistance in putting down an insurgency was helpful. The fact that the insurgents were natives did not bother me; so were their antagonists, and I have never believed that civil wars are somehow more virtuous and rational than wars of any other kind. From my point of view, the operations of the Vietcong were, and still are, every bit as irrational as I now believe ours are. They don't seem to mind destroying their country any more than we do. I can understand why some Americans should be indifferent to the fate of Vietnam—to a certain degree, and to my own dismay, I am coming to feel that way myself—but I cannot understand why any Vietnamese should be indifferent to it. I wish Johnson would swallow his pride, whatever the consequences, but it seems to me it is positively idiotic for Ho Chi Minh not to take Johnson and Rusk at their word and, if what they are saying is all a bluff, call it. Why not set a place and a date, and see whether Rusk shows up? Everybody knows that unless American forces stay in Vietnam for the rest of history the Vietcong are going to have their triumphs anyway; if they negotiated us out of there tomorrow on any terms at all, the country would be theirs before long. (Tran Van Dinh, a former South Vietnamese diplomat, at odds with the Saigon regime, has speculated that this very knowledge may be a reason for Ho's not negotiating. Our departure would create a vacuum that would for a time be filled by the Vietcong but would ultimately be vulnerable to Chinese pressure. Tran Van Dinh believes that one of the last things Ho really wants is a complete American pullout.) If the Vietcong can remain as strong as they seem to be with all the Americans chasing them around the country, they should have no trouble at all seizing power after they sat down and told us enough lies about the future to make it impossible for us not to agree to get out. The

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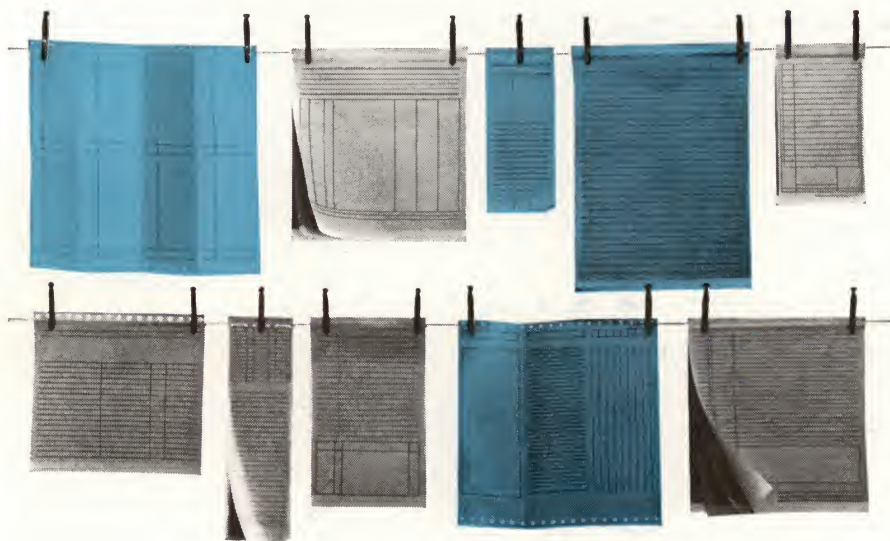
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American people love to be lied to at peace conferences, and if that happened in this instance the guerrilla could put away his shooting irons, turn respectable, run for office, and run the country. General Ky could get a job with Pan American World Airways or just loll about on the Riviera, where he would be an authentic part of the scene and would find a lot of his old friends as well as many new ones.

Nothing so agreeable is going to happen. It is up to us to make the first move. Until recently, I felt that the best first move would be a relatively small one—small but visible: not necessarily putting an end to the bombing but announcing a plan for scaling it down. I know Air Force officers who wouldn't object to this. Why, it may be asked, should they, since the targets are mostly gone anyway? But many other Air Force people would not object to something of the sort being done for political reasons even if they had strategic reservations. I did not think such a move would be of the least help in "bringing Hanoi to the conference table," but I thought that almost any de-escalation would put an end to our scaring everyone else about our intentions, particularly toward the Chinese, and would help prepare us for the inevitable. In time, Johnson or some other President may begin a phased withdrawal in that way. But I now fear that it will soon be too late—by which I mean too late to undo the damage to us. And it is we ourselves in this moment of history that we must think of before we think of anyone or anything else. This is a terrible thing to feel compelled to say. Edwin Reischauer, in his "Beyond Vietnam: The United States and Asia," argues that of the three options he thinks we have—escalation and a likely war with China, complete withdrawal as soon as possible, and plodding along on our present bloody and repugnant course—the last is the least disastrous and hence the most acceptable. Reischauer, who was until recently our Ambassador in Japan, is a fine scholar and humanist who has great respect and affection for the people of Asia, among whom he lived and studied for many years before John F. Kennedy persuaded him to leave scholarship for diplomacy. He is no hawk, no imperialist, no warrior of any kind. He thinks we were crazy ever to get into this and crazy to have let it reach this point. But what he fears most of all is that if we abandon this undertaking now, we will tell ourselves that Asia is impossible, that we should never again have anything to do with it, and will

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abandon not only Vietnam but all of Asia, with the likely exception of Japan. I share his fear. We might treat Asia as we treated Europe after 1918. We must ask ourselves right now whether that wouldn't be a pretty good idea. From some points of view, it might be an excellent idea. If our foreign policy in Asia produces such a monstrosity as the Vietnam war, why not get out? But, as Reischauer sees it, and as I would like to see it, our foreign policy in Asia is more than just the war in Vietnam. Most of Asia needs our help desperately, and we can perhaps use a good deal of Asian help in growing up. I want to go on having an American presence in Asia, because I don't want people to starve to death if we can prevent it, and I don't want Asians to despise my children and grandchildren and plot to destroy them.

Anyway, the thing wouldn't work. In recent years, a good many people have urged the dismantling of NATO, on the ground that it is no longer needed and that what is sometimes called "the European system" can work on its own. Whenever such proposals were brought to the attention of George Ball, the former Under-Secretary of State and a dedicated Europeanist, he would ask their sponsors if they remembered what had happened to "the European system" in 1914 and in 1939. Things may have changed in Europe lately, but there has never been anything anyone could call "the Asian system," capable of settling what diplomats call "regional" problems—usually meaning wars. Even if China managed to contain itself, which doesn't seem very likely, there would still be a good deal of unpleasantness between India and Pakistan. Making their own nuclear weapons might seem more important to them than it does now. And there would be unpleasantness elsewhere in Southeast Asia. And who knows whether some of Japan's long-range planners might not start casting a speculative eye on the "power vacuums" we would be creating?

Until very recently, these considerations put me in substantial agreement with Reischauer that perhaps Johnson's way offers fewer dangers than any of the others. But now I think we have reached—or are just about to reach—a point at which the argument no longer holds water. For one thing, if we continue much longer we may pull out of Asia whether we win, lose, or draw in Vietnam. It happens to be the view of our people that they don't want their kids to be killed so that Asians can go on eating. Most of them would see no logic in saying there is a



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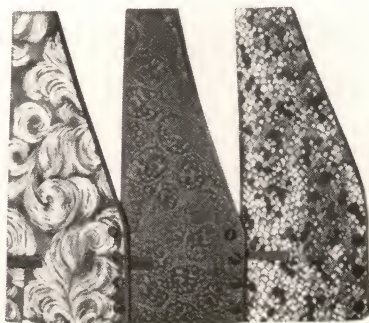
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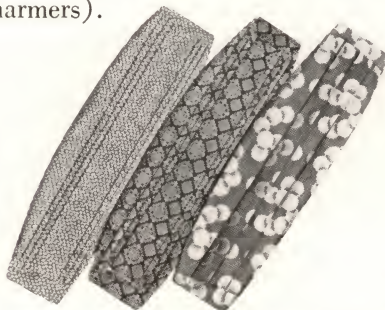


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Continental	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61

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necessary connection between starvation in India and Americans getting shot in Vietnam, but even if the logic were self-evident they would reject it. Beyond all that, however, we seem as incapable as the South Vietnamese of running a war—or, at any rate, *this* war—and doing anything worthwhile at the same time. Congress insists on cutting our decent programs elsewhere in the world—to say nothing of those in this country—almost to the point of absurdity. In a literal sense, it is finding a way to make the wretched of the earth foot the bill for Vietnam. This isn't its intention, and as a nation we are still more generous than most, yet not only are innocent people dying in Vietnam but, because of the dollars-and-cents cost of the war, they are dying in Africa.

The war in Vietnam is heading too many of us for the loony bin. People who could once talk sensibly about politics are becoming unhinged and disoriented by it. Some are really thinking seriously of running Ronald Reagan for President. A young man who used to be a provocative analyst now screwily and oracularly proclaims that "morality, like politics, starts at the barrel of a gun." This is printed in a local high-brow journal, and it takes a professor from California to remind this well-educated ex-humanist, now evidently en route to some kind of New Left Fascism, that politics *ends* at the barrel of a gun. Not long ago, a highly intelligent and attractive young Negro spokesman for a radical organization said that he couldn't see any reason anyone should write a book about poverty—he was talking of Michael Harrington's "The Other America"—because anyone who was really poor and had lived in a ghetto knew all there was to know about it anyway. He said he himself could tell it like it is, but thought a book about it was a waste of anyone's time. The land is filling up with cranks and zanies—some well intentioned, some vicious. It can be contended that Vietnam is not the only cause of goofing off, of alienation. Of course it isn't. But it provides the occasion, and it heightens the degree. And so it seems to me that if we stay on in Vietnam we will render ourselves incapable of being of much help to Asians or anyone else. We will need all the help we can get ourselves. If Ronald Reagan became President, I'd say by all means let's not have a foreign policy.

**I** WANT us to get out, and then try to recover our sanity, so that we may face the consequences. Some of them cause me almost no concern.



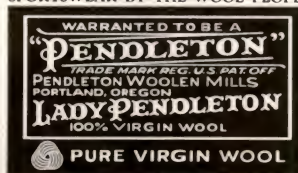
The spread of Communism bothers me very little. It may be bad in some places and not so bad in others, but we can live with it just about anywhere—even ninety miles from Key West. Once, it was, or seemed to be, a world movement, and it was surely a brutally expansionist one. But its adventures in expansionism blunted its threat as a world movement. By 1948, when Tito broke with Stalin, it should have been clear that ideology was no match for nationalism—at least in Europe. When China broke with Russia, it was obvious that the same thing went for Asia. Perhaps if we had borne in mind the history of earlier religious movements we could have seen all this fifty years ago. But we didn't see it, and neither, of course, did they. At any rate, we now know that the mere circumstance that a piece of real estate falls under Communist control doesn't constitute a threat to our existence, and doesn't even mean there is no more hope for the people involved. Nor, with things as they are, can my first concern be with the indisputable fact that by pulling out we would be breaking our pledge not only to the Vietnamese but to the Thais and others to whom what would follow might be quite painful. We are going to get out sooner or later anyway, and when we do we will not go back in, so, no matter what happens in the near future, they are going to have to work out their relations with China without much support from us. But some of the consequences of withdrawal disturb me greatly. By and large, I think that most of American foreign policy for the last thirty years has been admirable. I want us to continue to be part of the world and to use our considerable talents for the benefit of all mankind. I suspect that if we get out of Vietnam we won't have much left in the way of a foreign policy. And, most of all, I fear what will happen right here if we withdraw. Theodore C. Sorensen writes that since Khrushchev could admit a mistake in the missile crisis five years ago, and Kennedy could acknowledge one at the Bay of Pigs a year before that, Lyndon Johnson ought to be able to do the same thing now. Here are two analogies that do not work at all. The missile crisis was over in a few days, the Bay of Pigs in a few hours. No Russian soldiers died in the missile crisis, no American ones at the Bay of Pigs. It would take greater magnanimity and a greater dedication to the truth than we have any right to expect of any politician on earth for Lyndon John-

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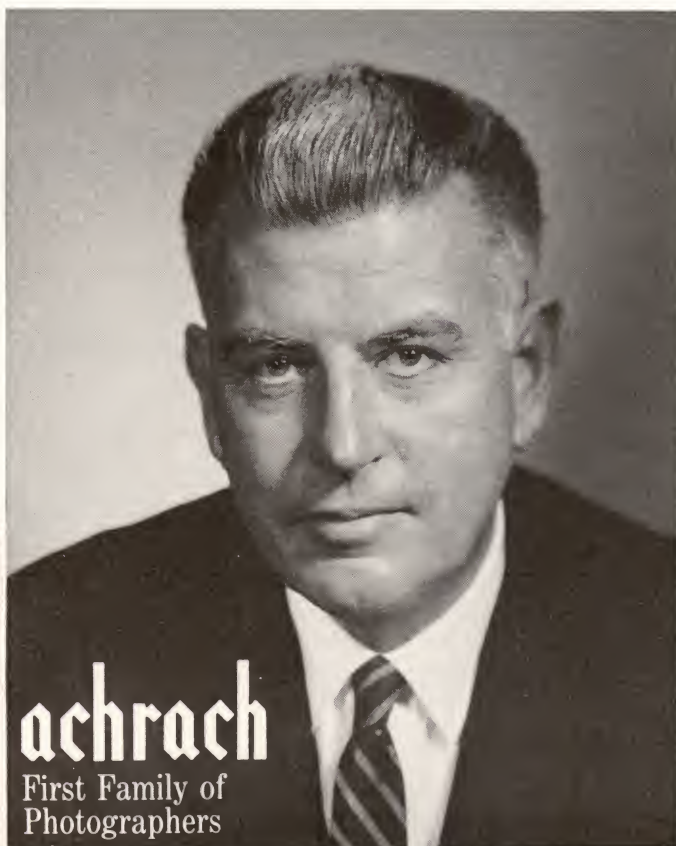
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son to say that this whole bloody business is a mistake, and was from the start. He just cannot and will not do it. If he did, he would throw this country into worse turmoil than it has known at any time since the Civil War. Could he pull out and either say nothing or tell some lies? Could he possibly use Senator Aiken's ploy and announce that we had achieved our ends in Vietnam and were withdrawing? Perhaps, but there would still be turmoil. There will be turmoil whether we stay or go, and I dread it. But, between the two, I have less fear of the consequences of withdrawal than of those of perseverance.

This war is intolerable. What does it mean to say that? Not much—talk is cheap. I haven't a clue as to how we can get out, and I have never much liked the idea of proposing without knowing of a means of disposing. I don't think we can write our way out, and I doubt very much if we can demonstrate our way out. But out is where I want us to be, and I don't know what a man can do except say what he thinks and feels.

—RICHARD H. ROVERE

## SUNDAY MORNING, WATKINS GLEN

(AFTER EDWARD HOPPER)

The yellow frame lodge of the Indians—  
Chequaga Tribe 19 of the Improved  
Order of Red Men—wears the morning  
on  
Its false front like a tan. My braves, so  
long  
Lie all the west-cast shadows of light  
poles  
And fireplugs that they snap and run  
right up  
The walls of your wood tepee while you  
sleep  
Off ritual and revel (which is which?)  
In the lace shadow of the yellowish-  
Gray curtains up above the barbershop—  
Whose pole still turns on Sunday—or on  
top  
Of Paradiso's Restaurant (Businessmen's  
Lunch .95 and Up), or in the flat  
Over the Green Star Souvenirs. Red  
Men,  
The sun that penetrates the frosted glass  
Of your wigwam's front door and strikes  
the dark  
Staircase below the pendent mystery—  
Gilt type and tassels on a blue sunburst—  
Now beams alone upon the lazy motes  
That hang above the happy hunting  
ground  
Of a lost brotherhood of warriors  
In tribal ties and J. C. Penney suits.

—L. E. SISSMAN